



**AARP Solutions Statement
White House Conference on Aging
July 6, 2005**

Good morning, my name is Frank Price and I am a member of the AARP State Legislative Team.

AARP is pleased to provide recommendations to the White House Conference on Aging. We appreciate the opportunity to present our ideas about public policies and services to enable America's population to age with independence and dignity.

AARP believes that there has never been a more pressing need for public dialogue about how our nation will address the diverse needs of an aging population. The population aged 65+ is projected to grow by 38 percent in the next couple of decades. At the start of the 20th century, only 13 percent of the population was age 50 or older. Today--over a century later--those aged 50+ comprise over 27% of the population, and this trend is expected to continue for well into the future.

AARP believes that our nation's public policies should permit people to plan and live empowered lives. That belief drives AARP's thinking about how best to ensure economic and health security, as well as how to best provide a needed social services.

To ensure the economic security of an aging population, we must address Social Security, other retirement savings, employment, managing and protecting financial assets, and financial literacy. Health and long term care policy must include making health care, including prescription drugs, more affordable, expanding long term care settings to include more home and community based options, ensuring quality of care, and

encouraging health promotion. And our array of social services policies should enhance the quality of life for all individuals as they age in “livable” communities that offer accessible and user-friendly options in housing, transportation, and supportive services. What follows are some of the key recommendations from AARP’s resolutions to the White House Conference on Aging.

While each of these topics are important and we will submit the full text of our testimony in writing, I would like to focus my oral remarks specifically on keeping seniors health and independent.

Expanding Available Settings for Long Term Care

Publicly-funded long-term care financing currently favors institutional care, especially nursing home care, while functionally limited consumers overwhelmingly prefer to live at home and receive care in chosen communities whenever possible. Public programs should adopt financing strategies that develop and promote expanded alternatives to nursing home placements. Decisions about eligibility for public programs should be made in a manner that permits consumers to choose appropriate settings when their needs arise.

Uncompensated care given by families and personal affiliates constitutes the backbone of the long term care service delivery system, with the vast majority of care provided by family and friends. This informal care is coming under greater pressure from changes in family structure and the economy. Caregivers need to be supported through respite care, tax credits and development of appropriate home-and-community-based options. Federal and state governments should provide financing and programs to support caregivers and relieve caregiving burdens.

Health Promotion

The benefits of health promotion (e.g., physical activity, smoking cessation, diet and nutrition, physical and mental health screening) could help Americans 50+ live healthier,

longer lives, delay the onset of disability, and avoid unnecessary health care costs. This is a shared responsibility of the public sector, employers, and individuals. Publicly-sponsored health promotion programs should study and take into account the methods and types of health promotions and interventions that will maximize and sustain healthy opportunities and outcomes of people 50+.

Livable Communities

As people age, most want to live in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. A livable community actively promotes the inclusion of residents in its social and economic life through the physical features, programs and readily accessible services that enable older residents and people with disabilities to remain independent and actively engaged in community life. This requires diverse and affordable housing options for households of different income levels, increased use of universal design features, improving mobility options including transportation services and walkability, and stronger planning to guide development decisions.

Reauthorization of The Older Americans Act

Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act (OAA) will be critical to our nation's safety net. OAA has historically enjoyed broad bipartisan support and care must be taken to avoid a repeat of the lengthy period of reauthorization caused by controversial amendments from 1995 to 2000. The likelihood of a less contentious OAA reauthorization can be greatly improved through a number of recommendations including: avoiding expansion of mandatory or voluntary "cost-sharing" provisions for services, strengthening provisions to increase access to Legal Assistance to the Elderly, retaining emphasis on services to frail and low-income and minority elders, establishing adequate authorization and appropriations levels, maintaining the viability of Title V - SCSEP as an economic security resource for low income older workers and a program that strengthens community service, strengthening the role of OAA programs in providing home and community-based care, ensuring continued viability of the National

Family Caregiver Support Program, and ensuring viability of elder abuse and domestic violence prevention, intervention and related elder justice activities and outreach demonstrations.

The White House Conference on Aging provides an important and timely opportunity for AARP and other interested parties to participate in a process that will advise national leaders and policymakers on the key issues facing older Americans. AARP is looking ahead with anticipation to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging and all the important and good work that we can do together to improve the quality of life for Americans as we age. Thank you.